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TAGS: PREL NATO MOPS FR AF  
SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA DOWNPLAYS EXPECTATIONS ON AFGHANISTAN

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    1B. PARIS 193  
    1C. PARIS 276

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone for reas  
ons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) Summary and comment. After a round of relatively encouraging meetings when CENTCOM commander General Petraeus was in Paris (ref C), Philippe Errera, Strategic Affairs advisor to FM Kouchner, provided to Pol M/C on February 24 a surprisingly negative assessment of possible French contributions to Afghanistan in response to ref tel A demarche on engaging allies in Afghanistan. For the first time, he took note of the recent public statements of DefMin Morin and FM Kouchner pledging that no additional contributions are currently planned, without adding the reassurance that such statements are designed for domestic consumption until after the NATO reintegration debate is completed. Further, he questioned the utility of additional forces given the planned large influx of U.S. forces. On the civilian side, he said that the French are studying a joint Franco-Afghan police training project, but that France hesitates to add more layers to a system that already has numerous uncoordinated training projects underway. He cautioned that OMLT's are a question of available military capacities and gave a long list of reasons why PRT's may not be useful or effective in the current Afghan environment. Errera requested coordination with the USG on contingency planning for Afghan elections in the event that the electoral calendar must be advanced. In sum, his message constituted a cold shower to our hopes for increased French engagement in Afghanistan, although post notes that the MFA is not the central, or the only, decision-maker. We will follow up with senior contacts in the President's office to see if the current message is reflective of a broader shift in the GOF against Afghan engagement, or if it is only indicative of the MFA getting cold feet.

12. Summary and comment continued: Errera's position stands in contrast that of the President's Diplomatic advisor, Jean-David Levitte, who had informed General Petraeus two weeks ago that France was prepared to bolster its deployments, but not until this summer and under the guise of a readjustment rather than an augmentation (see ref C for details). The deepening economic crisis and possibility of social unrest linked to domestic reforms, worsening poll numbers for the President and Prime Minister, and the fierce political debate that has erupted over France's return to NATO military command are all factors which post believes are influencing French official decisions at this time. Post also notes that the deployment of troops is a decision that will ultimately be taken by President Sarkozy in cooperation with the Chief of Defense, so our best sources remain those in the Elysee, with the MFA playing a lesser role. Post will

follow up with Sarkozy's strategic affairs advisor to determine if the opinions expressed in this meeting are reflective of a new shift in French attitudes towards Afghanistan, or if the cold feet we are sensing is indicative of a more cautious approach only at the MFA. End summary and comment.

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#### MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

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¶ 13. (C/NF) Errera opened the meeting by noting recent public statements by both DefMin Morin and FM Kouchner pledging that no additional military contributions to Afghanistan are currently planned. Pol M/C pushed back, noting that numerous French officials (including Errera himself) had recently reassured us that the public statements downplaying military contributions were due to domestic political reasons, but were always caveated by the statement "at this time" to give French officials the option of a policy change later in the year (Embassy note: Per ref B, the GOF is anxious to avoid linking Afghanistan with downsizing in other overseas deployments or with French plans to reintegrate fully into the military command of NATO). Errera then admitted that "one should never say never" but emphasized that additional Afghanistan contributions would be difficult in any case, for the following reasons: (1) Afghanistan deployments are unpopular domestically; (2) the operational tempo in the lead up to Afghan elections conflicts with French timing on NATO reintegration and other issues; and (3) questions are being raised about their added value, due to the recent large increase in U.S. troops (Embassy Note: The latter point is one we also heard recently from Director of Strategic Affairs at the MOD, Michel Miraillet. In that meeting, Miraillet expressed his view that many European countries would use the plus-up in U.S. troops as an excuse not to provide additional troops of their own.)

¶ 14. (C/NF) When Pol M/C raised the possibility of France providing additional trainers for the Afghan National Army via OMLT's, Errera was equally pessimistic. He simply noted that OMLT's can only be manned by trained military personnel and it was a question of both availability and overall numbers of troops on the ground that France is prepared to deploy.

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#### CIVILIAN/POLICE ISSUES

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¶ 15. (C/NF) Errera said that on the civilian side, the GOF is studying various proposals, including police training. He informed us that an Afghan delegation interested in a police training program will be visiting Paris the first week of March to follow up on the French delegation's January visit to Kabul. The GOF was pleased that the Afghan government has outlined very specific requests, which are now under consideration. Errera acknowledged that there is an urgent need for more trainers, but added that French officials are wary of adding layers to those efforts currently on the ground through bilateral programs, EUROPOL, the police camp in ISAF, etc. Paris wants to be able to channel their efforts into an overall strategy to ensure that their contribution would be helpful.

¶ 16. (C/NF) France has historically negated any possibility of deploying a PRT, largely on the ideological grounds that they could not constitutionally or legally accept military command over civilians (see 2007-08 reporting). However, Pol M/C made a push for the French to re-consider their position and provide a PRT for Kapisa province in RC-East where a French maneuver battalion is located. Errera surprised us by stating that French officials had recently taken a second look at this possibility, but they remain opposed to standing up a PRT, this time for political reasons. Essentially, he argued that UN Special Representative Kai Eide has come out against the introduction of more PRT's because they are

constructed with little coordination with the Afghan central government and it is difficult to track if their accomplishments are in line with the Afghan National Development Strategy. Further, when FM Kouchner visited a Canadian PRT last year, he was aghast to see how drastically security considerations limited outreach to the local population.

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AFGHAN ELECTIONS: DO WE HAVE PLAN B?

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¶7. (C/NF) Finally, Errera wanted to raise with us the possibility of contingency planning in the event that elections in Afghanistan must be moved forward from the August 20 date. He noted that Afghanistan would enter a difficult period of instability with the expiration of Karzai's mandate in May. In the event that the Afghans cannot agree on a caretaker government and powers for the next few months, the international community may be under increased pressure to move up the date of the elections. He requested that we share our thoughts on any contingency planning that the USG has undertaken and if such was not already taking place, he urged our consideration of possible a "Plan B" if events do not unfold as expected.

PEKALA